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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000937

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#) [KU](#)

SUBJECT: FM ZEBARI PESSIMISTIC ON IRAQ-KUWAIT RELATIONS
FOLLOWING "VERY, VERY BAD MEETING" ON MARGINS OF DOHA

REF: BAGHDAD 918

Classified By: PMIN Robert Ford for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Iraq-Kuwait relations are stuck following what appears to have been a difficult bilateral on the margins of last week's Arab League Summit in Doha. FM Zebari, in an April 4 meeting with PMIN, recounted a tense exchange between PM Maliki and Kuwaiti Amir al-Sabah: Maliki refused to commit to current borders and the Amir responded that, in that case, Iraq will remain under Chapter VII indefinitely. Maliki, Zebari said, continues to balk at carrying out Iraq's international obligations vis-a-vis Kuwait. Zebari also provided details of recent internal GOI discussions on Kuwait in which Maliki's legal advisor, Dr. Fadel, made clear his contempt for Kuwaiti claims and accused the MFA of taking a too lenient stand. These developments stand in sharp contrast to the positive signals of progress that had followed the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister's February 26 visit to Baghdad. End summary.

A Very Bad Meeting

¶2. (C) In an hour-long meeting with PMIN in which he often displayed his characteristic optimism, FM Zebari turned darkly serious when he assessed the state of Iraq-Kuwait relations. Underlining that "Washington needs to understand this," Zebari said PM Maliki's meeting with Kuwaiti Amir al-Sabah in Doha was "one of the toughest meetings I have ever been in." Efforts to discuss the range of outstanding bilateral issues came to an abrupt halt when Maliki, according to Zebari, refused to commit to current borders -- and said so explicitly in front of the Amir and the entire Kuwaiti Cabinet. Zebari said "I have never seen the Amir so angry and upset . . . in response he said, 'in that case, the international resolutions on Iraq will stay.'"

At the Root - PM's Disdain for Kuwaiti Claims

¶3. (C) The stormy drama in Doha, Zebari made clear, was not a bolt out of the blue but rather reflected positions the PM and his advisors have been staking out with the MFA for several weeks. According to Zebari, in early March, soon after the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister's much heralded visit to Baghdad, Maliki's Legal Advisor, Dr. Fadel, accused the MFA (and in particular Deputy FM Haj Hamoud who had lead MFA negotiations with Kuwait) of being too lenient: "what is this insect (i.e. Kuwait) that we have to be afraid of?" Fadel, who Zebari implied both shapes and reflects Maliki's views on Kuwait, "thinks the borders are illegitimate, that they have taken our lands, our port, that this was imposed on Iraq by the UN Security Council and that he intends revoke it."

Zebari said he had asked Fadel rhetorically if he wanted "to go back to war with Kuwait." He also underlined that Kuwait negotiations are not the purview of the PM alone but of the Iraqi Cabinet as a whole -- a position Zebari claimed GOI ministers support.

Kuwaitis Will Stick to Their Guns and
Wait for Maliki's Successor

14. (C) Looking ahead, Zebari assessed prospects for progress on the Kuwait front as dim, at least for the rest of the year: "They will not relinquish their rights and they will not give up on these issues -- debt, compensation, borders. They would rather wait for a new government in Baghdad."

Comment

15. (C) Zebari's account of the Doha meeting generally
Q5. (C) Zebari's account of the Doha meeting generally corroborates the readout given to us earlier in the week by Maliki's Chief of Staff (reftel). After several months in which the arc of Iraq-Kuwait bilateral relations has been generally positive, the Doha bilateral looks to be a significant setback. Its wider implications are not clear: taking a tough stand with Kuwait (should this become public) may give bolster Maliki's nationalist credentials in some quarters. We defer to our posts in neighboring countries but

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it would appear likely to us that Maliki's stance will also raise concerns among the Arab neighbors about his nature and true intentions.

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